

Minolta X-700 X700 Test Review

by Ken Rockwell



Minolta X-700

INTRODUCTION

This is Minolta's best mass market manual focus camera, ever.

A testament to its lasting and good design, it was introduced in the early 1980s and was in continuous production until the beginning of 2001. I had a very new one with a serial number above 3,000,000, and I also bought an X-570 (it's brother) back in 1982.

It uses all of the Minolta manual focus lenses made since the 1960s, although you'll have better luck in program mode if you stick to the newest MD lenses.

SPECIFICATIONS

It has program and aperture-preferred automation modes.

Manual mode only indicates the suggested shutter speed in the finder; you have to take your eye away from the finder to see what you've actually set.

It weighs 17.5oz (520 g)

Unlike amateur cameras like the \$1,000 Nikon F100, the Minolta X-700 has a stainless steel lens mount.

"MPS" on the front stands for "Minolta Program System," which was hot stuff when Program automation cameras were novel in 1985. Today it just means it has program mode, like every other camera.

It has a cloth horizontal focal plane shutter.

It runs on two S76 button cells.

PERFORMANCE

Metering includes most of the frame, only discounting a little along the top. I prefer more heavily center weighted meters like those in Nikons or the Canon AV-1

My meter was consistently off by about 2/3 of a stop, so I shot ISO 50 Fuji Velvia at EI 80. Once I set that, it was fine.

The finder is very bright, brighter than my Nikons!

Unlike the Nikons of the same era which outperform their low light specifications, the X-700 is poor for night photography below about EV1 since the meter and automation really do stop at about EV 1. Other cameras of the era would make and meter correct time exposures out to several minutes. The problem with the X-700 is

that there appears to be a bias dark current in the meter equivalent to about a light level reading about 1/4 second at EI 1600.

Also bad for night photography on a tripod, one cannot use the self timer and the AE lock at the same time, since they are on the same switch. You have to shield any sources of light with your hand and release the shutter with a cable release and then get your hand out of the way fast. Otherwise you would have to keep the AEL button pressed by hand during the exposure, blurring your results. You can't get the AE to lock without holding the button.

At least it has a real cable release socket, unlike most modern Canon and Nikon cameras.

The AEL lock retains the same total exposure in A automation mode even if you change the aperture after you've pressed AEL. Unlike Nikon and Mamiya, where you can easily set exposure compensation by pressing AEL and then changing the aperture, doing this on the X-700 gets you no change in exposure. This means you need to set exposure either by pointing the camera in a different direction and using the AEL button, or using the typically clumsy compensation dial.

It indicates LOW BATTERY by turning off the LEDs in the finder, even though the camera continues to work. Nikons don't have this feature; they just stop working. The X-700 indicates low battery sooner than the Nikons turn off, meaning that batteries that are low in the X-700 may still work OK in the Nikons.

I bought an X-570 brand new in the early 1980s because I could not afford the exotic X-700. The X-570, almost identical to the X-700, often indicated low batteries when the temperature dropped below about 55F. My Minolta Autometer IIIF also turned off before the batteries really were dead, even in nice weather. Living now in La Jolla where every day is like the first day of spring I will have no idea how the X-700 works in the cold, thank God.

I usually prefer Program mode on Nikons, but don't like the X-700's program mode simply because it's programmed differently than I'd normally set things. Its program is slanted towards fast shutter

speeds and large apertures. Therefore I usually use Aperture priority mode instead.

Minolta suggests the newer MD lenses for the X-700's program mode.

Program mode works fine with the one 50mm f/1.4 MC lens I have. MC are an older series of lenses. Minolta cautions that you may get some screwy exposures with the MC lenses, so try it first.